
NEWS

Neighbors voice concerns about proposed warehouse at Wyman Gordon

Lisa Redmond, Special to the Grafton News

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GRAFTON – Neighbors to the proposed 330,000-square-foot warehouse facility within the Wyman Gordon property are concerned that a spike in traffic, noise and air pollution created by the increase of 18-wheelers coming and going from the 26-acre site will sink their property values and make their neighborhood unbearable.

But there is another concern being raised: hazardous waste.

At the Dec. 13 meeting, Planning Board member Robert Hassinger said he's been contacted by residents of the neighborhood concerned that hazardous materials buried decades ago on another part of the 160-acre Wyman Gordon property could leach into the groundwater if the proposed warehouse site is disturbed.

Developer Churchill and Banks Companies LLC is proposing to construct a 70-bay warehousing and industrial shipping distribution facility on the front portion of the 244 Worcester St. site. As yet, the tenants for the proposed facility are unknown. The property is zoned for industrial use, but across Worcester Street are residential neighborhoods.

Churchill & Banks is seeking a special permit and site plan review from the Planning Board, as well as permits and approvals from the Conservation Commission.

The proposed warehouse site is on a small portion of land at the front of the Wyman Gordon property, while the burial site is on another part of the massive Wyman Gordon property.

Brigham Hill Road resident James Shannon has repeatedly warned the Planning Board about the hazardous materials buried somewhere on the 232-acre property, asking the board not to grant any approvals for the warehouse project until testing is done.

Wyman Gordon, a long-time forging and stamping business, straddles the Grafton-Millbury town line. Shannon said Millbury officials are closely monitoring the warehouse project

because Millbury has drinking water wells near the Wyman Gordon property.

“What happens on that 26-acres has an effect on the land behind it,” Shannon told the board.

Attorney Mark Donahue, representing the developer, explained the owner of the contaminated site – not his client – is liable to report the hazardous waste and remediate it.

As for traffic and other issues, Donahue agreed to appear before the board on Jan. 24 after a revised traffic study is done and other concerns are addressed.

Churchill and Banks CEO and President Richard Baccari told the board that a standard practice in purchasing real estate is to get an environmental report on the property before moving forward with the process. He hired two environmental consultants to analyze the 26-acre parcel. The consultants told him the property is “deemed clean,” he said.

“I can’t speak about other parts of the site,” Baccari said, “It’s not my business.”

On Jan. 30, 1991, the Worcester Telegram & Gazette reported that Timothy C. Johnson, of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, appeared before the Grafton Board of Selectmen to discuss the status of radioactive waste buried more than 30 years in 25 unlined trenches at on the Wyman Gordon property.

The trenches contain approximately 50,000 pounds of radioactive magnesium-thorium alloy waste and contaminated tools, the newspaper reported. Between 1958 and 1971, Wyman Gordon had several licenses for the possession and use of magnesium-thorium alloys and uranium. The last license was terminated in 1971.

Groundwater sampling performed after 1983 was “determined to be questionable,” according to a report. However, Wyman Gordon and the state considered that “there was no hazard to public health, although findings were not documented.”

A Sept. 23, 1990, story in the T&G questioned the previous disposals and groundwater sampling prompted a meeting between state officials, federal regulators, the Grafton selectmen and Wyman Gordon officials who agreed to do a new on-site, off-site groundwater sampling program.

A battery of tests of the groundwater on the property and residential drinking water wells downstream at the time showed “no radiation levels in excess of the EPA’s safe drinking water standards or naturally occurring radiation background levels,” the T&G reported.

Johnson told the board that more study was needed to determine whether the waste trenches could pose any future exposure hazards.

An old federal radioactive material license showed that Wyman Gordon also used uranium for certain forging work in the 1950s and 1960s at its Grafton and Worcester forging plants. But the files indicate all the uranium waste was shipped back to a supplier and none of it was disposed on the property.

In a September 2014, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued a report that Wyman Gordon expected to complete the cleanup effort, under the watchful eyes of the state Department of Environmental Protection and the EPA, by December 2014.